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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 569th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 27 September 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Second periodic report of Mexico (continued)
(CRC/C/65/Add.6; HRI/CORE/1/Add.12/Rev.1; CRC/C/Q/MEX/2; written replies of the Government of Mexico to questions raised in the list of issues (document with no symbol distributed in the meeting room))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Mexico resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation to answer the questions posed by the Committee. Noting the large number of questions, he advised the delegation to be succinct and to indicate simply where the information could be found if it had been already provided in a written document.

3. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico), replying to Mrs. Karp's question on the budget allocation for defence spending, said that Mexico's defence budget was one of the smallest in Latin America and the world. Citing figures, he demonstrated that only a small percentage of the budget was earmarked for defence spending and that in 1998, for example, the Government had spent seven times more on education than on defence. Closer attention was being paid to indigenous issues, such as language, and hundreds of thousands of books now existed in various indigenous languages.

4. With regard to refugees, it was worth noting that close to 50,000 Guatemalan refugees had entered Mexico over the past decades. The refugee programme had ended in July 1999 but had allowed 22,000 Guatemalans to receive resident status. Some of the refugees had chosen to return to Guatemala, while others had been naturalized and the Government was working on regularizing the situation of illegal immigrant Guatemalans who were married to Mexican women.

5. Ms. CARDENAS MIRANDA (Mexico), addressing the issue of adoptions, stressed that the priority measure taken with regard to abandoned children was the attempt to reintegrate them in their biological families. If that was not possible, then, in keeping with the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Mexico was a party, the authorities would first seek to have children adopted by nationals before resorting to intercountry adoption, as shown by available statistics.

6. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico), replying to questions on the situation in Chiapas, said that there had been no reports of violation of children's rights there by members of the military or paramilitary, except for one unfortunate case of a reported massacre. In fact, since the term "paramilitary" suggested some type of military training, it would be more appropriate to refer to the presence of civilian armed groups in Chiapas. An investigation was being carried out on the basis of reports submitted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and newspaper articles into abuses allegedly committed by a number of groups. The investigation had determined that five of the alleged

groups did not exist. However, the investigation would continue, and the previous week the Procurator-General of the Republic had announced that members of two of the groups had been imprisoned.

7. Ms. SÁNCHEZ REGALADO (Mexico), expanding on the question of the education of indigenous children, said that many indigenous languages and dialects were being used as the first language of instruction, followed by Spanish. Furthermore, one focus of elementary education was a literacy programme for mothers.

8. The CHAIRPERSON asked for further information on the social situation of the indigenous population, as it seemed that the average number of years spent in school by indigenous children fell below the national average. Mortality rates were also reported to be higher among indigenous children. He wished to know if there were programmes to improve the access of indigenous people to education and health care.

9. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico) said that one of the problems relating to the underdevelopment experienced by indigenous communities was geographic, as they were scattered across the country in remote, sparsely-populated areas. When the indigenous policy had been first introduced in 1948, the Government had mistakenly tried to integrate indigenous communities into the Mexican development process. However, the focus had since shifted to greater autonomy and self-government. Although indigenous customs had come to be recognized under the Constitution, some were more admirable than others, so that a balance had to be found between Mexican law and some of those practices and customs. Legislative reforms had been introduced in 16 Mexican states recognizing the rights and cultures of the indigenous population and additional auxiliary and magistrate's courts had subsequently been established.

10. The Government was focusing attention on eliminating extreme poverty, with more than half the State budget being allocated to that end. Since indigenous populations accounted for 90 per cent of persons living in extreme poverty, they stood to gain the most. In the context of those efforts, mortality rates had dropped and measles and poliomyelitis had been eradicated.

11. The CHAIRPERSON asked the delegation to provide information on NGO participation in the preparation of periodic reports and in the newly created monitoring systems. Also, what was the status of the process, introduced by the President of the Republic, for monitoring implementation of the Convention?

12. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico) said that there were 8,000 NGOs involved in work with children, women, indigenous communities, the environment and rural organizations. With specific reference to NGOs involved in children's issues, the Government had begun collaborating with NGOs working with street children and children involved in prostitution, which had not been the case at the time of preparing the report. Beyond differences between political parties, views invariably converged with regard to children's issues, which showed the importance attached to children's rights in Mexico.

13. The CHAIRPERSON reminded the delegation that the question on the monitoring mechanisms remained unanswered.

14. Ms. CARDENAS MIRANDA (Mexico) replied that the National System for the Integral Development of the Family (DIF) was responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention at national and state levels. Seven commissions had already been set up and others were being envisaged. The DIF also collaborated with NGOs to eradicate the commercial sexual exploitation of children and in the interest of disabled children, within the framework of a national programme promoting the welfare of persons with disabilities.

15. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico) said that the bulk of the collaboration with NGOs concerned training programmes of various forms. Furthermore, all state human rights commissions carried out activities to promote children's rights.

16. Ms. PÉREZ DUARTE y NOROÑA (Mexico), supplementing the information provided on the involvement of NGOs in the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention, pointed out that the council of the National Women's Commission, which also dealt with children's rights, was mainly made up of NGOs.

Family Environment and Alternative Care and Basic Health and Welfare

17. Mr. RABAH, supported by Mrs. Ouedraogo, said he would like to know what the procedures were for intercountry adoption. Regarding alternative care, did Mexico have foster homes and how were they organized, and did NGOs have any input in that regard?

18. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said she would also like to know whether there were bilateral agreements between Mexico and the United States to ensure the payment of maintenance allowances. Malnutrition seemed to be a serious problem; how was that taken into account in the programmes in favour of the disadvantaged and persons in extreme difficulty? She wanted to know what facilities existed for disabled persons to have access to public transport and buildings. Apparently even in those states where such laws existed they were not enforced. She further questioned why special attention had been given to girls, to the detriment of boys, in the programme of care for adolescent mothers, as reproductive health concerned both boys and girls. She wondered what the scope of the programme was, especially in the light of the objections expressed by certain religious groups.

19. Mrs. SARDENBERG expressed concern about the situation of indigenous people in Mexico and referred to recommendations made by the Committee in 1994; while a change could not be expected overnight, it was important for the Committee to be well informed. Regarding Chiapas, which had received extensive coverage in the media, she asked for details about the mandate and activities of the Political and Social Action Group for Chiapas (GAPS) mentioned in the Government's reply to question 22 of the list of issues. Turning to family environment and alternative care, she welcomed Mexico's ratification of the Hague Convention on intercountry adoption, but asked whether a central authority had been appointed for adoptions in the framework of the Convention. In addition to the importance of controlling adoption,

which could be linked to drug trafficking and other problems, such an authority could play a role in raising awareness of the need to increase the low number of domestic adoptions. Regarding single-parent households, she asked whether support measures specifically intended for single-parent households headed by women were included in the Government's programmes.

20. Mrs. EL GUINDI asked for clarification of reports that the number of domestic adoptions in Mexico was low and that illegal adoption was common practice. She would also like details about the results of the programme of care for adolescent mothers.

21. Mrs. KARP, referring to Mexico's efforts to combat domestic violence, asked whether corporal punishment was considered to be a form of domestic violence. Regarding the mental health of teenagers, she asked whether institutions existed for counselling children on issues affecting them when they did not wish to consult their parents and for providing treatment without the parents' consent. She would also like to know whether there were special clinics and hospitals for children with mental problems, whether children could be institutionalized against their will and what the procedure was for doing so.

22. Mrs. TIGERSTEDT-TAHTELA, referring to article 4 of the Mexican Constitution, asked how the autonomy granted to indigenous cultures operated in practice and how membership in an indigenous group was determined.

The meeting was suspended at 3.52 p.m. and resumed at 4 p.m.

23. Ms. PEREZ DUARTE y NOROÑA (Mexico), replying to questions on violence, said that action to combat intra-family violence was part of a broad programme to combat violence in general. Corporal punishment was considered to be a form of intra-family violence, and part of a cycle of violence. Action being taken to combat it included the correction of legislation exempting parents from criminal responsibility for harm inflicted on children in the exercise of parental discipline. Regarding the identification of indigenous communities, it was the communities themselves, rather than the government authorities, which decided their status, membership and language on the basis of their customs and traditions. Affiliation of children was a part of that identification process. The Government's role was limited to registering indigenous children in the national system, for ease of identification in case of conflicts or disputes, and to the provision of support.

24. Ms. CARDENAS MIRANDA (Mexico), replying to questions on adoption, said that international adoptions took place in the framework of the Hague Convention when the adoptant's country was a State party to the Convention. Legislation giving effect to the Hague Convention made the central authority for international adoption the federal DIF system for the federal district and the state DIF System in each State, between which a flow of information was maintained at all times. Adoption proceedings took place between the central authorities of the countries concerned and included an exchange of information regarding the suitability of the prospective adoptive parents and the child to be adopted; authorization was also sought from the receiving State for the child to reside there. Following the exchange of information the entire file was submitted to a family judge, of whom there were 40 in Mexico, who decided

whether the adoption should proceed. Follow-up of international adoptions was conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its Department of Consular Affairs. If the country involved was not a party to the Hague Convention, domestic legislation applied and no exchange of information took place.

25. Children who could not be reintegrated into their families and who were unlikely to be adopted were accommodated in DIF centres, of which 52 existed for children aged 6 to 18 and 35 for children from birth to age 6, and in centres operated by non-governmental organizations. Concerning the possibility of increasing the number of domestic adoptions, she said that the "culture of adoption" was new in Mexico and that current efforts concentrated on raising the people's awareness of its importance.

26. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico), replying to a question about nutrition, said that a national vaccination card had been introduced in 1998, which contained a record of children's measurements and vaccinations and made it possible to judge their state of nutrition. Deficiencies in vitamin A and iodine had been detected and efforts were under way to correct them. A school breakfast programme also existed which provided 4 million breakfasts a day. It covered 85 per cent of the municipalities providing immediate assistance to children, in particular those which had a high concentration of indigenous people. Other programmes of support, in the same municipalities, involved soup kitchens and the distribution of packets of vegetable seeds.

27. The mandate of the GAPS programme was to ensure that as many resources as possible were invested to meet the needs of Chiapas and other States with a large number of indigenous people, the greatest enemies being extreme poverty, corruption, disease and the middlemen through whom indigenous people were forced to sell their products. The GAPS mandate also included education where efforts focused on increasing construction of schools, pupil enrolment, number of teachers and health support.

28. Ms. CARDENAS MIRANDA (Mexico), replying to questions on disability, said that the national programme for the welfare of disabled persons and their incorporation in development, introduced by President Zedillo in 1995, had counterparts at state level and operated through subcommittees covering areas such as accessibility, telecommunications and transport, sports, culture, education, labour insertion, legislation and statistics. The achievements of the subcommittee on legislation had been substantial: each State had its own law on the social integration of disabled persons, and Mexico had signed the Inter-American Convention to Eliminate Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, which was before the Senate for approval. Concerning accessibility, she said that a programme conducted in Mexico City had led to the elimination of many obstacles impeding the movement of disabled people, but that efforts concentrated for the moment on eliminating cultural barriers, so that disabled people would not have to live in an aggressive environment. The programme had achieved significant results in its four years of operation, and its annual reports provided an opportunity for interaction with NGOs, working on behalf of disabled people.

29. Ms. SÁNCHEZ REGALADO (Mexico) said that although special education services existed for those children who could not attend the regular school

system, article 41 of the General Education Act focused on the integration of children with disabilities into the regular education system. To that end provision was made for teacher training and textbooks in braille were distributed free of charge.

30. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico) noted that the special education programme included vocational workshops for disabled children and agreements with private companies to hire young disabled people. The greater awareness of the problems of disabled people in the 1980s had culminated in the idea that disabled children should attend regular schools and that normal children should be taught to respect disabled children's right to be different.

31. Ms. CARDENAS MIRANDA (Mexico) said that Mexico's alimony programme was modelled on that of the United States, to which many Mexican fathers emigrated in order to avoid paying maintenance. A joint Mexico-United States programme aimed at recovering maintenance from Mexican fathers who had emigrated to the United States was operated by DIF, through its Procurator's Office for the Defence of Juveniles and the Family, and received support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

32. Ms. PEREZ DUARTE y NOROÑA (Mexico) said that in addition to specific programmes for teenage mothers, a series of programmes on sexual and reproductive health attempted to raise awareness among both boys and girls of their responsibility in controlling reproduction. Regarding the right of the child to privacy in schools, she said a recent operation in border States with serious problems of drugs and violence, in which children's schoolbags had been searched, had been an exception brought about by the urgency of those problems. Children's right to privacy was generally respected in schools.

33. Ms. CARDENAS MIRANDA (Mexico) said that Mexico endeavoured to eliminate traffic in minors, in the spirit of the Hague Convention. Although illegal adoptions unfortunately did take place, the DIF system had received no actual reports of such cases. Regarding foster care, she said Mexico did not have a foster care structure as such, but concentrated support on providing needy families, including unmarried mothers, with the necessary assistance to support their children.

34. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico), replying to Mrs. Ouedraogo, said that Mexican legislation provided for the construction of wheelchair-accessible ramps in public buildings. NGOs, including "Libre acceso" (Free Access), a dynamic group with which DIF had worked extensively, had been instrumental in those achievements.

35. Ms. PEREZ DUARTE y NOROÑA (Mexico) said she was happy to announce that while in the past there had been taboos surrounding questions of sex, they were gradually disappearing thanks to the media and special programmes such as those implemented under the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) and the National System for the Integral Development of the Family (DIF), the Office of the Procurator and the National Council for the Prevention and Control of AIDS (CONASIDA). Under the law, in the event of a conflict of interest between minors and their legal guardians with regard to health care, urgent measures could be taken through the Office of the Procurator, which was the cornerstone of the child protection system. The Government could also

intervene to appoint guardians. Abortion was allowed only in special cases, for instance if the health of the mother or child was endangered, but the decision was taken with medical advice, while other measures were applied in the event of a conflict of interest.

36. Ms. SÁNCHEZ REGALADO (Mexico) said that while reproductive health and sex education of children aged 10-12 had originally been opposed by parents' associations, they had soon acknowledged that such education was better imparted by trained teachers.

37. The CHAIRPERSON invited Committee members to ask follow-up questions.

38. Mrs. KARP, on the subject of adolescent medical counselling, asked whether adolescents had access to condoms, and whether if a girl who had been raped desired an abortion, there was any committee or hospital service that could authorize it if the girl did not wish to do so illegally. Had it been determined whether the best medium of sex education was the teacher, or professional guidance counsellors not involved in the child's day-to-day school life? Since sex education had not yet attained its goal of providing the child with adequate education on sexual behaviour, STDs and AIDS, and given public opposition to sex education in schools, what solution did the delegation envisage?

39. Mrs. SARDENBERG reiterated her question as to whether there were special programmes or institutions for single parents, what personal care they received, and what category of children was covered.

40. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the delegation felt that the law-enforcement authorities were adequately trained to deal with such matters as examining sexual-abuse victims, or whether those tasks were performed by other professionals.

41. Ms. PEREZ DUARTE y NORONA (Mexico) said that specialized agents in the Office of the Procurator dealt with cases of violation against minors and that there was a special agency for attention to victims of sexual abuse. The process had taken time, because it had not been easy to provide such care, but progress was being made. In response to Mrs. Karp's question, she said that CONASIDA visited schools and supplied teenagers with condoms and contraceptive information, as part of reproductive health programmes. There was a wide range of assistance comprising special programmes and textbooks, as well as visits by NGOs, working in tandem with the public sector, to lecture in schools.

42. Abortion was not penalized in the case of rape. The girl was required to be examined at a public hospital to determine the degree of rape. Single-parent homes abounded and were usually headed by a woman; general public policies had therefore been altered to take account of that fact. Credit was set aside for housing and education for single-parent families, through the Programme for Education, Health and Nutrition (PROGRESA) among others. Also, maternal responsibility being different from paternal responsibility, mothers rather than fathers were approached even in two-parent families where it was clearly wiser for money to pass through the mother's hands.

43. Mr. RUIZ y AVILA (Mexico) said the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) had been established at the behest of the first Chairperson of Amnesty International in Mexico, who had lobbied for the creation of a special agency composed mostly of women: physicians, psychologists, lawyers, social workers and the like. Given incidents in which aggressors had intimidated their victims when brought face to face with them, a new provision stipulated that electronic means be used in order to avoid direct confrontation and coercion. With regard to intra-family violence, new reforms instituted in August 1999 refused bail to the perpetrators of violence against or corruption of minors, even when they did not live in the same house.

Education and special protection measures

44. Mrs. KARP asked whether the new special procedures for catering to victims of violence were restricted to Mexico City or extended to the entire country, and whether there was any specialized national unit for the purpose. She wished to know why corporal punishment in schools and institutions was not specifically prohibited in Mexican legislation, which needed to send a clear message from the Government to the public. Had such a measure been envisaged?

45. Under the criminal justice system, there was only a handful of States where legal responsibility began at age 18 or 17, as opposed to 14 or 16. She wished to know the ratio of children deprived of their liberty - if not by the courts, at least in care institutions - to adult detainees. Juveniles were patently detained in poor conditions, sometimes even alongside adults. Could children aged 14-16 be brought to trial in the same way as adults? What was Mexico doing to implement an equitable and non-discriminatory criminal justice system, so that the interests of the child were protected by juvenile justice? Did the Government have any specific plans to implement the changes recommended by the Committee in 1995? She was aware that a special commission existed to investigate cases of homosexuality practised by border children for purposes of prostitution, and wondered whether that commission had initiated any special projects in that connection. Had it been allocated the manpower and financial resources required for any preventive or treatment plan?

46. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO, referring to the decentralization and privatization of health services, asked whether any particular structures were planned for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged segments of the population, who lacked access to the health system. What progress had been made with extending social security coverage to independent workers and their families? Further, since the juvenile suicide figures contained in Mexico's second periodic report were out of date, she called for more recent statistics.

47. She congratulated the country on the progress made in the field of education, but would like more data on its educational aims, which had not been clearly reflected in the report. She asked how educational establishments' compliance with human rights requirements was monitored, and whether any curriculum-assessment exercise had been undertaken to enhance the quality of education. She would also like to know whether the objectives set for the 1998 World Bank-supported programme to increase educational access for the disabled were attainable, and whether any had yet been met. She congratulated Mexico on its successes in integrating refugee children. Since,

however, the process was a protracted one and no legislation as yet existed for their protection, how would the Government proceed pending examination of a case?

48. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked what measures were being taken to address the problem of forced repatriation of children from the United States over the Mexican border under cover of night, a problem linked to child trafficking and "disappearances" of undocumented children. She wished to know precisely why the survey carried out on street children had specifically excluded Mexico City when the phenomenon was an urban one.

49. Mr. RABAH pointed out that the Mexican report had devoted little space to attention to early education or to children placed in crèches while their mothers went out to work. He also wished to know what was being done to improve the pupil/teacher ratio in pre-school education, which was sometimes as high as 30:1, and whether any special measures were envisaged in connection with the use of play and leisure time. Concerning the juvenile justice system, he sought more detailed information on detention centres, and asked what relationship existed between the Public Prosecutor's Office and police stations. Were there any "half-way" houses for juveniles on completion of their sentences? Did they receive any legal aid prior to or during their appearance in court? Were there any workshops for social workers, lawyers, judges or the police?

The meeting was suspended at 5.10 p.m. and resumed at 5.20 p.m.

50. Mrs. QUEDRAOGO asked what was being done for the 36 per cent of births which took place outside health establishments.

51. Mr. RUIZ y ÁVILA (Mexico) said that the maternal mortality rate had declined slightly in recent years, from 5.4 deaths per 10,000 live births in 1990 to 4.6 per 10,000 in 1997. The levels were significantly different from one State to another. In 1997 the main causes of maternal mortality were pregnancy toxaemia, haemorrhage during pregnancy and delivery, and post-natal complications, which together accounted for 60.8 per cent of all maternal deaths. Abortion was the third most prevalent cause of maternal mortality, and in an effort to reduce such complications the Ministry of Health had trained 551 specialists in 56 hospitals of 17 States in manual aspiration techniques. In order to reduce the number of abortions, the use of contraceptives was taught and encouraged. About 68 per cent of women of child-bearing age currently used some kind of contraceptive, and contraceptive use was growing by approximately 1.2 per cent per year. The rate of use tended to be high in the north and far lower in the southern States such as Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca. Women accounted for 94 per cent of contraceptive users.

52. The Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS), in addition to paying retirement pensions, provided medical coverage for workers and employers through a network of about 1,000 hospitals located throughout the country. State employees were covered by a scheme administered by the Welfare and Social Services Institute for State Employees (ISSSTE). People not covered by the two schemes for public and private sector employees could receive medical attention at hospitals run by the Ministry of Health, where fees were

generally reduced for persons without coverage. There was also a Community Care Programme (PAC) and a civil defence programme called DN3, which was run by the army and was called upon to take action in the event of natural disasters. It had, for instance, distributed medicines and provided medical care within Mexico and in Guatemala and El Salvador following Hurricane Mitch. There were currently no plans to privatize the health-care services.

53. Ms. PÉREZ DUARTE y NOROÑA said that home births delivered by qualified midwives or women who traditionally assisted in childbirth had been customary for generations in Mexico, and that in most cases the practice did not involve a high risk factor.

54. With regard to programmes for victims of violence and sexual abuse, the reforms to which Mr. Ruiz y Ávila had referred were taking place only in the Federal District, but the programmes run by agencies specialized in that field continued to be implemented throughout the country. On 29 July 1999, the programme for Guatemalan refugees in Mexico had drawn to a close with the repatriation of the last refugees wishing to return to Guatemala. There were, for all intents and purposes, no more refugees in the country. The Guatemalans who had stayed had either received or had applied for immigrant status or residence permits. Although Mexico was not yet a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the programme for Guatemalan refugees had been held up as an example by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, because it had met with such success in integrating refugees and in promoting their voluntary return.

55. The juvenile justice system was one of the weakest points in the legal system. The concept of juvenile judge did not exist. However, it was not true that the decision to send minors to institutions lay with the administrative authorities. Such decisions were taken by collegial bodies which covered the cases of juvenile offenders, and which applied rules different from those in the Penal Code. The main reason for the weakness of the juvenile justice system was not so much a failure of the legal structure as a lack of resources for the protection and custodial centres, which had not received appropriate attention. The poor conditions of minors at some adult prisons were not representative of the entire country, but rather of small rural communities where no specific custodial centres for minors existed. Care had been taken to inform the police of the need to send minors on to such special centres without delay. In some places, such as Guadalajara or Monterey, minors were sent on within 24 hours, while in others it could take much longer. The age of the minors at custodial centres was generally between 14 and 16, and in any case never exceeded 18. Much emphasis was placed on the role of the family in rehabilitation. In cases of children under 14, responsibility was assigned as far as possible to the family, and only in extreme cases should such offenders be placed in juvenile care institutions. Juvenile offenders and their families could receive legal aid through consultations provided free of charge. In small, remote villages where there was no such service, it was the National System for the Integral Development of the Family (DIF) which provided legal assistance to offending minors and their families. While the delegation could provide no statistics on the number of teenage suicides between 1993 and 1999, a youth hotline had been established to combat the phenomenon.

56. Ms. SÁNCHEZ REGALADO (Mexico), responding to a question put by Mrs. El Guindi, said that there was no legal reason to include types of school punishment in documentation. Teachers underwent vocational training in which they learned professional ethics, and they themselves knew how to provide children with a quality education conducive to their development. The Education Development Programme for the period from 1995 to 2000 had established certain objectives and the main lines of educational policy, which included the provision of high quality education, competently and equitably dispensed. The national education system was quite extensive, reaching some 28.5 million pupils, with 1.4 million teachers in 212,000 establishments. Two special compensatory programmes were being implemented with the aim of aiding disadvantaged and indigenous groups in communities of fewer than 100 and 1,000 inhabitants, respectively, in cooperation with the World Bank. Literacy, nutrition and health campaigns were also conducted with the mothers of the children benefiting from such programmes.

57. All private schools were registered with the Ministry of Public Education and had to observe nationally-set standards for education, and specifically the basic curricula. Like state schools, private schools received texts without charge and benefited from state plans and programmes for teachers.

58. Ms. CARDENAS MIRANDA (Mexico) said that in the Federal District a law governed all social assistance provided by private institutions. The private institutions concerned had formed an association, which had the dual objective of promoting private social assistance and of coordinating such programmes once they were under way. A specific programme for minors repatriated from the United States provided shelter through 11 hostels set up by the authorities and 7 more run by non-governmental organizations, all located near the border. Though the programme was headed by DIF, it was in large part run by state and local governments. In 1998 some 8,500 minors had found shelter in such establishments. An information system was being set up to make it easier to reunite such minors with their families.

59. In November 1997 Mexico had received the visit of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Ofelia Calcetas Santos, whose conclusions and recommendations had been extremely useful in drafting a plan of action, which had been submitted for approval in November 1998. A National Inter-Institutional Commission for the Elimination of the Sexual Exploitation of Children had been established to implement the plan, and worked closely with local bodies, some of which had been established in towns attracting large numbers of tourists, such as Puerto Vallarta-Jalisco. One of the most important consequences of the plan had been that the authorities were beginning to understand the scale of the problem. The Inter-American Children's Institute had sponsored a study on violence and sexual exploitation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean, in consultation with a Mexican NGO. A study concentrating on about 100 towns with child sexual tourism, pornography or prostitution was to be conducted by UNICEF, DIF and independent researchers, and was due to begin in October 1999. Experts in the subject from Canada and the United States were also working closely with Mexican social researchers on the same question.

60. A study had also been carried out on the situation of street children in 100 towns, excluding the Federal District, which could not initially be included for technical reasons owing to the recent change of local government. It had thus been established that there were some 114,000 children working on the streets. Above all, the study had served to refute a number of preconceived ideas which had proven to be myths. For example, the number of street children had often been estimated in the millions. In addition, it was determined that most children working in the street were not alone and had not been abandoned by their families as had previously been thought, but were working in order to bring home some income. The conclusions of that and the other studies would help in the drawing up of a policy to improve the conditions of those street children, and first and foremost to safeguard their moral and physical integrity.

61. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that there had been a clear change in the attitude of the Mexican Government toward the rights of the child, and that much progress had been made in various areas. Notwithstanding the serious poverty which persisted as the country underwent structural adjustment, the Government had made a serious effort to incorporate the principles and provisions of the Convention in the national legislation and programmes. At a time when the country's political system was opening up, it was encouraging to see that the Government was proving its commitment to the rights of the child. As the High Commissioner for Human Rights was about to embark on a trip to Mexico, it was perhaps the right time to use the concluding observations and recommendations of the Committee to formulate a proposal for international cooperation. Mexico could benefit from cooperation with UNICEF, the World Bank and other agencies, but questions such as training and the establishment of national institutions could sometimes best be dealt with by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Convention could serve as a very useful tool in that process.

62. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the delegation for its effort and cooperation. The Committee was looking forward to further collaboration, particularly with a view to the follow-up meeting to the World Summit for Children, which was scheduled for 2001.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.